

TOM PURSGLOVE MP
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

27th October 2020

Dear Constance,

RE: PRESS FREEDOM & JULIAN ASSANGE – EDM 179.

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of freedom of the press in relation to Julian Assange, with specific reference to Early Day Motion (EDM) 179.

Notwithstanding the fact that as a Government Minister I am unable to sign EDMs, in any event, I have general concerns about the effectiveness and expense of the EDM system, and I think it is much more effective to raise concerns directly with Ministers, both verbally, and in writing, rather than signing EDMs. With that in mind, I have spoken to Ministers directly about your concerns.

I was encouraged to see the situation in the Ecuadorean Embassy finally come to an end. Ecuador's actions recognise that the UK's criminal justice system is one in which rights are protected and in which, contrary to what Mr Assange and his supporters may claim, he and his legitimate interests will be protected.

As you will know, in May 2019, as a result of Mr Assange's failure to surrender in relation to his extradition proceedings, he was sentenced to 50 weeks in prison.

You may also be aware that the then Home Secretary signed an extradition warrant, following a request by the US Department of Justice. In making this decision, the then Home Secretary had limitations on what could be considered, in line with the *Crime & Courts Act 2013*; judgments on human rights or health issues can only be made in court.

I understand that the extradition hearing for this case has now adjourned and a ruling will be delivered in January. I can assure you that I will closely follow any new developments as they occur.

I agree that journalists play a vital role in our society and must be free at all times to do their jobs without fear. The Minister for Media & Data made this clear recently when he signed the public statement issued by the National Union of Journalists, calling for the freedom of the press to be respected and protected. As he said, "*Journalism is a bedrock of democracy and those who are keeping our communities informed and holding the powerful to account must not be intimidated or threatened as they carry out their work. We stand with journalists and will do all we can to support them in doing their jobs without fear or favour.*"

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tom'.

TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE